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What Can We Believe?

The American people, for the most part, have confidence in their leaders and in their government. Discounting the obvious 'campaign oratory'—as the late Wendell Willkie once tagged it—most of us believe what we hear from politicians and executives of government.

Edwin A. Lahey's column in Sunday's Beacon Journal, goes a long way toward undermining that faith. For Lahey, chief of our Washington staff and a most reliable reporter, questions whether Candidates Kennedy and Nixon were as completely unaware, last October, of U. S. plans and efforts to aid the Cuban exiles' invasion as they made out to be in their campaign talks.

Lahey points out that at that time, the Central Intelligence Agency was recruiting and training exiles.

Lahey also recalls specific untruths that were told about the U-2 plane and the anti-Castro pilots who were said to have "defected" from the Cuban air force.

"We have obviously come," Lahey concludes, "to a point in our national career where dishonesty can be justified in terms of 'national security.'"

"One of our absolutes is missing."

The loss of this absolute—truth—can be a damaging blow to confidence in American leadership. If we are to be deceived about the invasion of Cuba, what can we believe?

This problem of weighing the importance of telling the American people the truth against the demands of national security does not admit an easy solution.

It is one thing to say that the American people shall be told the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And something else when we realize we are fighting an enemy around the world who has equal access to the facts along with the American people.

As we see it, it is not wrong for the government to withhold the truth when national security demands it. It is wrong to lie.

The American people have proved, in years of peace and war, that they will measure up to everything demanded of them IF they know the truth. We trust our elected leaders. That confidence is not misplaced.

If we cannot believe our leaders, however, will we be as willing to follow them?